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ABSTRACT

Results of research attitudes toward the use of Irish in Ireland's schools are examined. The first section reports on three surveys of the adult public in 1973, 1983, and 1985. The second section discusses three surveys among national samples of young people in Ireland in 1980, 1981, and 1983. In the third section, two attitude surveys of primary school teachers are discussed. It is concluded that while there are some technical problems and some differences in emphasis and survey timing, the main surveys reviewed are generally consistent, and that discrepancies occur more in interpretation than in data. With regard to educational policy, the public pursues varied objectives and the majority endorses current policy. It is also generally agreed that "slow learners" and students whose parents do not endorse Irish instruction should not be required to learn Irish. Demand for change appears to come from minority groups with different viewpoints. Teachers are among the groups most proficient in Irish, most favorably disposed to it, and most likely to use it often. They also feel students with low academic or language ability should not be required to learn Irish. A new curriculum is desired. Students and young adults based their judgments on the perceived utility of the language. (MSE)

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Páipéar Ócáide
Occasional Paper

Public and teacher attitudes towards Irish in the schools

A review of recent surveys

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Public and teacher attitudes towards Irish in the schools

A review of recent surveys

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years a number of surveys have been conducted among the Irish public and teaching bodies to establish the degree to which Irish is supported, both in a general way and in the school system in particular. It should not be too surprising to find that, on the surface anyway, there would appear to be some differences in the findings of these surveys. Due to the rather complex nature of the attitudes held by the public and by specialised groups like teachers towards the Irish language and policies designed to promote its acquisition and use, it is almost inevitable that individual surveys, constrained by problems of cost and time, will place the emphasis of their questions on only some dimensions of the issues and ignore others. These technical and administrative matters, however, may not account for all differences. There is also the possibility that differences may arise in the interpretation of data.

Three recent surveys illustrate this problem. In 1984, Institiuid Teangeolaiochta Eireann (ITE) published the preliminary results of a national survey it had conducted the previous year. The report sought to establish trends over the last decade through a comparison of its findings with those of earlier surveys. By and large it appeared that the rather complex pattern of positive and negative attitudes revealed by a 1973 study had remained stable or had become more favourable. This seemed to be particularly the case with regard to the educational dimensions of Irish language policy. The report concluded that "attitudes towards Irish in the schools would appear to have improved substantially". Furthermore, these favourable changes appear to coincide with a strengthening public wish to see the state and its agencies become more active and committed to Irish language policy in a wide range of areas.

Just a year after this report was published, however, the reports of two other surveys were presented to the public. Both of these studies had been commissioned by the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) in 1984 and 1985. An INTO comment on these surveys states that "there is little commitment among the public generally to the restoration of the language as a medium of communication". And again, "The findings appear to illustrate . . . a basic contradiction in public attitudes to the Irish language. While, on the one hand, there is overwhelming support for the inclusion of Irish in the curriculum for primary schools, there is no support for the allocation of additional time or resources to the teaching of it".

Although I have quoted only a few sentences from these reports, it is clear that they contrast very markedly in both tone and substance. It should also be apparent that their implications for policy are radically different. It is, therefore, of some considerable importance to examine the evidence of the surveys in order to establish how far we may attribute these differences to the actual survey findings or how far the problem arises because of differences of interpretation.

These are the issues that will be addressed in this paper. Without anticipating the paper's conclusions it may be said at this point that there appears to be a reassuringly high degree of consistency between the various surveys. It also seems to me that while I will be arguing tht some INTO statements misrepresent the results of its surveys (see Appendix A), it is also clear that the data contained in its two surveys does point up some relevant issues for our consideration that previous studies did not examine in such full detail.

This paper is based on the text of a lecture given on 27 November 1985 in the premises of Bord na Gaeilge, 7 Merrion Square, Dublin. Some minor revisions have been made.

In order to explore these questions it will be necessary to situate the most recent research in a somewhat wider context. I propose to extend the discussion by making reference to earlier surveys and to a number of other surveys. The most important of these earlier studies are those conducted for the Committee on Irish Language Attitude Research, which was set up by the Government in the early seventies, while the secondary sources include a number of surveys on the attitudes of schoolchildren and young people. These latter surveys were not conducted primarily to enquire into the position of Irish but they do nonetheless provide us with information that cannot be obtained elsewhere. (For a full list of the surveys to be discussed in this paper, together with a brief description of each see Appendix B).

I would like to conclude this section by making a few general remarks about attitudinal studies. It may seem rather obvious, but it is necessary to bear in mind that attitudinal research has certain limitations in the context of policy evaluations. One would not expect to find a government, for example, basing its economic policy entirely on the findings of attitude surveys. Nor on the other hand, would we expect to find the views of businessmen, labour leaders, farmers or consumers totally ignored. This is a complex issue, and only a couple of points can be selected for comment. Many questions in these surveys ask respondents to state their views or opinions about matters that could be measured in other, perhaps more objective ways e.g. the ability of pupils to speak Irish. Very often we rely on this type of data because any alternative would simply be too expensive or time-consuming. However, it always remains important to keep the essentially subjective nature of attitudinal data in mind. My second comment relates to the frequency with which attitudinal surveys show that people often hold conflicting or contradictory views on policy issues. Many people find this disconcerting and regard it as evidence of irrational or illogical behaviour. I feel that we should be extremely slow to come to such conclusions. Social policy areas are very complex and people as a result tend to have multiple objectives, which can come into conflict with each other if it is attempted to realise them all at the same time. The tensions created by these conflicts do, of course, have to be resolved; but this is the task of the political process not of attitudinal surveys. Surveys can, if they are well constructed, provide us with some clues as to how people might like these tensions to be resolved, but often the issues are too complex for surveys to take all relevant factors into account.

Finally, it is necessary when considering the results of different surveys to carefully examine the manner in which their various samples were drawn and the actual survey administered. These technical matters can be responsible for differences in survey findings, but it will not be possible nor, in most cases, necessary to assess such questions here.

However, one important technical issue of this type concerns the two surveys of primary teachers and some comment cannot be avoided. The first of these was conducted in 1973 for the Committee on Irish Language Attitude Research and the second in 1984 by the INTO. The non-response rates were 40% and 51% respectively. The high non-response rate in each case clearly allows for the possibility of bias creeping into the results. There are various ways of checking for errors of this kind, including re-surveying, but I did not have either the time or the resources to do this. In this paper I will ignore the possibility of bias in those cases where statistical differences between or within surveys are substantial. In cases where the statistical differences are slight or marginal I feel that it would be unwise to draw any strong conclusions and that instead the similarities should be stressed. This applies in particular to some important questions in the INTO's survey of teachers where positive and negative responses were finely balanced.

OUTLINE OF PAPER

The surveys are considered in three groups. The first section discusses the three surveys conducted among the adult public in 1973, 1983 and 1985. The bodies who sponsored or conducted these surveys were, respectively, The Committee on Irish Language Attitude Research (CLAR), Institiuid Teangeolaiochta Eireann (ITE) and lastly, the Market Research Bureau of Ireland (MRBI) for the INTO. For convenience, these surveys will be referred to subsequently by the acronyms contained in brackets above.

The second section is probably best looked on as an appendix to the first. Here I will discuss, very briefly, three surveys conducted among national samples of young people, including schoolchildren, in 1980, 1981 and 1983. The surveys were conducted by the Irish Marketing Surveys (IMS) for Bord na Gaeilge, Damian Hannan and Richard Breen of the Economic and Social Research Institute and ITE respectively.

The third section discusses the two surveys of the attitudes of primary school teachers. As already noted, these were conducted in 1973 and 1984 by CLAR and the INTO respectively.

There is a certain amount of cross-referencing in all sections to material contained elsewhere, but the main overall conclusions are to be found in the final section.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS IRISH 1973-1985

COMMITTEE ON IRISH LANGUAGE ATTITUDES RESEARCH (1973)

An important point to emerge from the research conducted by the Committee was the finding that public attitudes to Irish cannot be measured or fully reflected by a single measure or survey question. Previous surveys had tended to ask people simply if they were 'in favour' of Irish. This survey showed quite clearly that people could answer 'yes' to this type of question and yet be vigorously opposed to many specific policies concerning Irish. It is, the Committee argued, more accurate and useful to think about public attitudes as patterned clusters of attitudes, some elements of which seem to be pulling in opposite directions.

In 1973, for example, the average person appeared to place a high value on Irish as a symbol of national identity and wished to see its transmission to the next generation secured. But at the same time there was a marked feeling of pessimism about the future of the language and a feeling that it was irrelevent for modern life. (See CLAR (1975) Chapter Two for details)

Although these last two sets of attitudes seem to seriously qualify the first, in the practical matter of policy this is not of great consequence. It would appear that the first attitudinal cluster — concerned with national identity — was the decisive determinant of views on policy. There was, in 1973, majority support for policies to establish or maintain Irish in the educational system, in the Gaeltacht, in the media and in public life generally. With regard to the position of Irish in primary schools, just 75% of respondents felt that it should be taught to *ALL* students. However, this support did not endorse all aspects of the policies then in force, and CLAR also noted that a majority opposed the compulsory status of Irish in post-primary school examinations and in recruitment/promotion processes within the Civil Service. [The survey was well under way when the policy on compulsory Irish was changed].

ITE: NATIONAL LANGUAGE SURVEY 1983

The replication survey conducted by ITE in 1983 showed this to be still the general pattern of attitudes, but with some changes. Attitudes regarding Irish as an element of national identity have become somewhat more favourable while feelings of pessimism, apathy or irrelevance remain almost exactly at 1973 levels. On the other hand, there is some evidence in this survey that Irish may have become less prominent as a public issue over the period. On most of the general attitudinal questions in 1983 there is a drift away from strongly held views. Respondents were more likely to 'mildly' rather than 'strongly' agree or disagree with the attitude statements. There was also an increase in the proportions replying 'don't know' to questions as to whether particular policies were being implemented effectively or not. This may be indicative of a public or a government, or both, showing less interest in the 'language question' than previously but we will have to await further analysis before the significance of these trends can be fully established.

Nonetheless, it is also noteworthy — and it also requires further explanation — in that there was a marked overall increase in support for practically all aspects of language policy — sometimes reversing the direction of the responses given in 1973. In the case of Irish in the schools, attitudes would appear to have improved substantially as can be seen from the figures included in Table 1.

Table 1. National Language Surveys 1973 and 1983: Percentage agreeing with attitude statements about Irish in the Schools.

Attitude Statements	% Agreeing 1973	1983
Children doing subjects through Irish don't do as well at school as those doing them through English	60	44
Most children resent having to learn Irish	66	51
Many children fail their exams because of Irish	77	40
Children seldom learn enough Irish to use it after school	77	66

Source: ITE (1984)

Given the wording of some of these questions, it may reasonably be argued that the 1973 decision to discontinue the policy whereby Irish was a compulsory subject for state examinations was in some measure responsible for this shift in attitude. But improved attitudes are evident too when there is no reference, direct or indirect, to the 'compulsion' issue. From this we conclude that other factors were operative as well.

Furthermore, when asked a more personal question about their own children, 72% (80% of young adults) said in 1983 that it was 'very' or 'fairly' important to them that their children grew up knowing Irish. In 1973 just 60% of parents were of this view.

Some questions asked only in 1983 are of interest in this context. In a question dealing specifically with the amount of Irish respondents would like to see included in school programmes, a majority (see Table 2) favoured a continuation of the present arrangement where it is taught as a subject to most children. But 25% would like to see the general introduction of bilingual programmes wherein some or all subjects would be taught through Irish and less than 5% wanted to see the teaching of Irish discontinued at either primary or post-primary levels.

Table 2. National Language Survey 1983: The amount of Irish respondents would like in the school programme for most children.

Amount of Irish programme	Primary (%)	Post-Pr. (%)
1. All-English (with no Irish at all)	3	4
2. Irish taught as a subject only	72	72
3. All-Irish (with English as a subject)	4	4
4. Bilingual, with		
(i) More subjects through English than through Irish	4	4
(ii) About 50/50	16	15
(iii) More subjects through Irish than through English	1	1
	100	100

Source: ITÉ (1984)

In reply to a yet more specific question, twenty-four percent said they would send (or would have sent) their children to an all-Irish primary school if it was locally available. It seems reasonable to assume, on the basis of the responses shown in Table 2, that support for bilingual schools would be even higher.

INTO/MRBI NATIONAL SURVEY 1985

In this survey of 1,000 adults conducted in early 1985, not many questions were asked which directly replicate questions asked in the CLAR & ITÉ surveys. But some questions are broadly similar and evoked generally similar responses. These relate to matters of active and passive language use.

Table 3: Some comparisons between INTO/MRBI (1985) and ITÉ (1983) surveys.

INTO/MRBI (1985)	ITÉ (1983)
3% speak Irish a lot	5% of homes include someone who speaks Irish often/always
11% speak Irish now and again	10% of homes include someone who speaks Irish occasionally
28% saw TV programme in Irish within past month.	20% watch TV programmes in Irish a few times a week.
10% read book in Irish in past year or more often.	10% reads book in Irish at least occasionally.

Source: ITÉ (1984) and MRBI (1985) op. cit.

In the case of these questions (and also in the case of some questions on educational policy which I will discuss in a moment) there is a very close similarity between the two surveys. This consistency suggests that the two surveys provide confirmation for each other and that we may validly integrate other questions which are not common into an overall assessment.

Eighty-four percent of the MRBI respondents say that Irish should be on the primary-school curriculum; 88% that the teaching of Irish should begin in infant or junior classes, 62% that all children should learn Irish at primary school and 52% that the amount of time devoted to the teaching of Irish in primary schools is just right. Not many of these items can be directly related to questions asked in the ITE survey, but there are one or two other statistics which can, I feel, be validly compared. Only 4% of respondents felt that Irish should not be taught at all and some 22% would like more time devoted to the teaching of Irish. The corresponding figures in the ITE survey, as noted in the preceding section, are 3% and 25%.

Exactly comparable questions are less easy to locate in the earlier CLAR survey although the general thrust of the responses in that case also indicated clear majority support for the teaching of Irish in first and second level schools. However, it should be noted that the 62% who feel that all children should learn Irish at primary school is a little lower than the percentage replying to a nearly identical question in 1973. Here the figure was 68% although the question asked about children in general and not just about primary school children.

Two further questions were asked in the MRBI/INTO survey which have no parallel in the other surveys. Fifty-six percent feel that slow learners should not have to learn Irish and 60% are opposed to children being taught Irish against the wishes of their parents. No identical questions were asked in the CLAR or ITE surveys but a question was asked in 1973 about attitudes towards the 'compulsory' Irish issue. In this case, some 60-70% of the sample were opposed to the policy of making a pass in Irish essential for receipt of the Leaving Certificate. Rather similar proportions opposing the compulsory Irish policy can be found in other surveys conducted in the 1960s. Despite the differences in the wording of these questions, I feel that they are all measuring the same basic attitude and that, therefore, there are at least two potentially conflicting elements in the general public view of the position of Irish in the schools. There is on the one hand, the view that Irish should be taught to all children from an early age, but there is also the view that this objective should accommodate the wishes of individual parents and aptitudes of pupils. Clearly, while some people adhere to one view but not the other, many people must simultaneously uphold both positions. It is possible, I believe, to see the policy changes that have occurred over the last few decades as efforts to at least contain the tension created by this conflict.

The remaining questions in the MRBI/INTO survey do not greatly add to our understanding of present tendencies in public attitudes, but they are, nonetheless, of considerable interest. These seek to establish the relative as well as the absolute importance attached to the teaching of Irish vis-a vis other subjects and issues. Other surveys, including CLAR and ITE, have included questions of this type. Their findings have generally indicated that Irish, while highly ranked in its own right, is not ranked as highly as other subjects. CLAR, for example, found that — despite the high degree of support for Irish — English and Continental languages were considered more important for post-primary students. Again, in 1983 the ITE survey asked respondents if the learning of Irish at school (the level was not specified) was 'more important' than the learning of science subjects and foreign languages. The percentages agreeing with these statements was 20% and 40% respectively, with 71% and 54% disagreeing. Both these surveys also suggest that the public are slightly more concerned to see Irish taught at primary level. The present survey, by and large, shows that this pattern continues to prevail.

The first question in the MRBI questionnaire simply asked respondents to list the most important subjects which children should learn in school. The question does not specifically refer to primary education and, in fact, most of the subjects listed are on the post-primary curriculum.

Table 4: Subjects regarded by respondents as the 'most important which children should learn in school'.

	Percentage listing each subject
Mathematics	81
English	73
Irish	34
Science	15
History	13
Geography	13
French	8
Woodwork	8
Home Economics	8
Computers	4
Other Subjects	40

Source: MRBI op. cit.

The range of subjects mentioned by respondents is extraordinarily wide and this may be due to the difficulty they may have had with the term 'importance' which was not defined in the question. However, the ranking of Irish is quite high at 34%. Only Maths and English are mentioned more frequently, albeit by substantially more respondents. On the other hand, Irish is mentioned more than twice as often than the next ranked subject, Science.

The second question is also clearly related to post-primary education. Here, however, importance would appear to mean the "relative usefulness" of subjects for school-leavers.

Table 5: Respondents' evaluations of the importance of selected subjects for school-leavers today.

	Very Imp.	Fairly Imp.	Neither Imp nor Unimp.	Fairly Unimp.	Very Unimp.
Irish	28	36	15	12	8
Mathematics	87	11	1	—	—
English	82	16	1	—	—
Home Economics	51	38	8	3	1
Woodwork/Metalwork	47	40	9	3	1
Science	43	43	9	4	—
French	29	47	13	9	2

Source: MRBI (1985) op. cit.

In this context support for Irish is high — 64% regard it as 'very' or 'fairly' important — although other subjects are considered more important. It may be useful to try to set these figures in some kind of context. In the 1973 survey respondents were asked which of a number of subjects should be taught to all post-primary students. The figures for English, French and Irish respectively were 98%, 89% and 70-77%. If this question is accepted as measuring roughly the same attitude, then it would appear that support for both French and Irish has fallen back somewhat.

A third question dealt specifically with primary schools. Respondents were asked about the importance they attached to children learning Irish, Irish history, games etc.

Table 6: Respondents' evaluations of the importance of learning certain subjects at primary school.

	Very Imp.	Fairly Imp.	Neither Imp nor Unimp.	Fairly Unimp.	Very Unimp.
The Irish language	33	38	15	8	5
Irish history	54	35	6	3	2
To play Irish games	36	40	13	8	3
Irish songs	29	43	15	9	3
Irish dancing	22	42	19	11	5

Source MRBI (1985) op. cit.

Seventy-one percent said that the learning of Irish was 'very' or 'fairly' important in this context. Only Irish history was regarded as more important. The figures suggest that Irish games were regarded as more important than Irish, but small differences of this magnitude in a sample survey are not statistically significant. It is a pity that we are not provided with information about the full range of subjects on the primary school curriculum, although some additional data can be gleaned from the next table.

Table 7: Respondents' evaluations of the attention certain areas should receive if the Government made more money available to improve the Primary School system.

	A lot more attent.	A little more attent.	Same amount attent.	A little less attent.	A lot less attent.
Improving teaching of Irish	24	24	29	12	9
Reducing class sizes	58	25	15	2	—
Improving teaching of Maths	55	28	16	—	—
Better facilities for PE	53	30	14	2	1
Improving teaching English	45	31	22	—	—
Improving School Buildings	30	33	30	6	1
Providing computers in Primary School	38	28	13	13	8

Source: MRBI (1985) op. cit.

This table cannot be directly compared with the measures of 'importance' used in the preceding tables. Here respondents were asked about the degree of attention specific matters should receive 'if the Government made more money available to improve the primary school system'. This quite particular context was not set for any of the preceding questions. Nonetheless, the relative ranking between Irish, English and Maths is much the same as in the other tables. However, this last table also indicates that there is no general wish to see the position of Irish downgraded in any

way. The contrary, in fact, would appear to be the case. Seventy-seven percent of respondents would like, in this context, to see the position of Irish at least maintained and 48% would like to see the teaching of Irish get more attention. Only 21% wished to see it get less attention.

Finally, while I can understand the wish to establish a comparison between Irish and other subjects, I cannot see the rationale for the inclusion of the other items in this table. Many, if not most, of these items are not in 'competition' with the teaching of Irish at all. Better school buildings, for example, or smaller class sizes would facilitate the teaching of most subjects, including Irish.

As I have said, these last four tables do not greatly add to our understanding of the main issue raised by this survey i.e. whether Irish should be taught to all or only some pupils. They provide no evidence to suggest that there has been a drift away from Irish, but rather indicate that within the context of a fairly wide curriculum majority support for the teaching of Irish continues to prevail. There is evidence in a few of these questions of a minority who would wish to see less attention given to Irish, but there is also evidence that a similar sized or even larger minority would like to see Irish more intensively taught.

SURVEYS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND SCHOOLCHILDREN

Becore I leave the question of national surveys, I would like to briefly refer to the results of some recent surveys conducted among young adults and school children.

In a survey of sixth-year post-primary pupils conducted by Hannan and Breen in 1981 some 4,000 pupils were questioned about their attitudes towards various aspects of their school curriculum. In the report of the survey results it appears that Irish was considered by the children to be about as difficult as French, Biology and Physics but considerably less highly regarded as an "interesting" subject (French was also low) or as a "useful" subject.

Table 8: Percentage of pupils who think various subjects are 'interesting', 'difficult' and 'useful' in Leaving Certificate classes 1981 (N=3967)

	Physics	Biology	Irish	French
Interesting	60	85	48	54
Difficult	50	56	59	56
Useful	78	90	52	88

Source: Hannan D., Breen R. et. al. **Schooling and Sex Roles: Sex Differences in Subject Provision and Student Choice in Irish Post-Primary Schools** (1983) ESRI, Dublin. p. 34.

Nevertheless about 50% hold positive views of Irish in these respects and it is worth noting that whereas nearly all students in the sample were studying Irish, not all would have had direct experience of the other subjects. The percentages are even higher in the case of girls and correspondingly lower in the case of boys. This gender difference is of considerable interest, but it is a question that cannot be pursued here.

The second survey of young people which I want to consider was conducted by IMS for Bord na Gaeilge in 1980. The sample consisted of 1,000 young people between the ages of 10 and 24 years, many of whom were, of course, still at school. Two thirds of this sample (65%) felt that a knowledge of Irish was an advantage (mostly for examination or employment purposes). Sixty-one percent of those still at

school, when asked how Irish compared with their other school subjects, replied that it was at least as interesting as any other subject. Irish was the most enjoyable subject for 9% and the least enjoyable for 24% (the corresponding figures for Maths were 15% and 22%).

In the ITE sample young adults were oversampled so as to yield a large sample (420) of young adults under 30 yrs. In a question that was similar to that included in the other two youth surveys, 44% replied that they disliked Irish because it was relatively less useful than other subjects, but only 21% disliked it because they 'had to' learn it. When asked if they disliked anything about the *way* Irish was taught to them 38% said dthat they did not dislike anything; 17% were critical of some aspect of their course; 14% were critical of particular teachers and the remainder mentioned a variety of other factors. In other words, there appeared to be no one major factor underlying the dissatisfaction of students in this respect.

The final item to be taken from this survey is of interest because it gives us an idea of how school pupils in recent times perceived their parents to feel about them learning Irish at school. Respondents were asked if their parents wanted them to learn Irish and why.

Table 9: Young adults' perceptions of the views of their parents about their children learning Irish at school.

	Mother %	Father %
Question: Did your parents want you to learn Irish?		
Did not want me to learn Irish	3	3
Did not care	42	46
Wanted me to learn Irish		
To pass exams	21	18
To get a job	6	7
To have Irish for its own sake	28	26
	100	100

Source: ITE (1984) op. cit.

Fifty-one to fifty-four percent believed that their parents wanted them to learn Irish (half for examination and employment purposes, otherwise cultural reasons). 42% felt they didn't care either way and only 3% of respondents said their parents didn't want them to learn Irish.

Because of differences in the ages and composition of these samples, overall conclusions can be only tentatively offered. It would appear that at least 50% or small majorities generally found Irish 'interesting', 'useful' and 'difficult' but comparisons on these measures with other subjects vary and it is probable that many students find, or found when they were at school, Irish no better or worse in these respects than other subjects. The finding that parents tended to be supportive, or at any rate not negative towards Irish is consistent with what parents themselves say in other surveys. In the ITE survey at least 31% were critical of the way they were taught Irish, although this criticism was directed in large measure against the course structure and/or content.

It should also be noted that many of these comments relate to post-primary experiences, but the importance for all students and parents of the perceived advantages a knowledge of Irish gives in examinations and in the job-market cannot be overlooked.

ATTITUDES OF PRIMARY TEACHERS TOWARDS IRISH (1973-1984)

Two surveys are available on the question of the attitudes of primary school teachers — the survey carried out for the Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research in 1973 and the survey conducted by the INTO in 1984. A full report of the 1973 survey findings was not published by the Committee, but key items were included in its main report which I have discussed above. I will be drawing on that source here and also on some unpublished working papers based on the survey data.

Before the survey findings are discussed, it may be worth reminding ourselves of the rather obvious point that teachers are likely to have a somewhat different perspective on the role of the Irish language in the schools than the general public. One question, common to both national and to both teacher surveys asked respondents if people would speak more Irish if it were better taught in the schools. The responses very clearly demonstrate these differences.

Table 10: Differences between primary teachers and the public regarding the relationship between learning and speaking Irish 1973-84

	% Agreeing	
	1973	1984
Statement: "If Irish were taught better in the schools, more people would speak it".		
National Survey	68	69
Primary Teacher Survey	30	30

Sources: CLAR, ITÉ and INTO surveys op. cit.

It is not possible, with the data currently available to examine this particular issue further, but the presence of a certain tension between what the public appear to demand of the schools and what the teachers think is possible cannot be ignored.

The CLAR Survey of Primary School Teachers (1973).

Because the 1973 survey of primary teachers contained a large number of the questions that were used in the national survey being conducted at the same time, the two surveys can be directly compared. Although we must bear in mind that the non-response rate in the teacher survey was high (as it was also in the 1984 survey which I will discuss in a moment), there was an overall tendency for the teacher sample to be more supportive of Irish, more proficient in the language and more likely to use Irish than the general population. As regards the status of Irish within the school system, 58% felt that Irish should be compulsory at primary school level, but only a minority felt that it should be compulsory at second level. CLAR also found that the levels of speaking ability among teachers had been declining for some years prior to the survey. A continuation of that trend would, of course, have implications for the maintenance of attitudinal and use patterns.

INTO Teachers Survey (1984)

A long and detailed questionnaire was used in this survey. Nearly 40% of the questions related to detailed matters of syllabus, curriculum and instructional objectives as they relate to the teaching of Irish. Only a small number of these items will be referred to in this paper, primarily those which can be directly or indirectly

related to the national surveys of public attitudes which have already been discussed.

The questions on proficiency in Irish and use of the language cannot be directly compared with the questions asked of the public in either the MRBI or ITE surveys and fewer comparable questions of an attitudinal nature were asked. Nonetheless, where even rough and ready comparisons can be made, it would appear that teachers continue to be significantly more proficient in Irish than the general public and to use the language more frequently in their professional and personal lives. Whether the difference is as pronounced as in 1973 cannot be judged on present evidence, but it would be my view that on the attitudinal questions the teachers, while more favourable to Irish than the public are not so to the same degree they were in 1973. However, there are not enough questions common to all surveys to allow this question to be more than raised.

With regard to issues relating to the teaching of Irish, the survey findings will be discussed under three general headings. These are (a) overall attitudes to teaching Irish, pupil achievement and the syllabus; (b) views on categories of pupils who should not learn Irish and, lastly, (c) minority responses to questions.

(a) General attitudes to teaching Irish, the syllabus etc.

What is clearly established by the survey is the very substantial degree of commitment of teachers to the teaching of Irish. Seventy-two percent of teachers describe their attitude to the teaching of Irish as "enthusiastic", and 67% state that their attitudes have remained favourable since they started teaching or that they have become more favourable. Over two-thirds of teachers would like to continue spending the same or more time teaching Irish as they do at present. Somewhat like the general public, a large majority of teachers (80%) feel that the teaching of oral Irish should begin in the infant classes with the teaching of reading and writing of Irish beginning in junior or middle classes.

On the other hand, 81% of teachers feel that "the results obtained do not reflect the amount of time spent teaching Irish", and 71% felt that "the expectations of the syllabus in Irish cannot be achieved within the amount of time available".

To explore these rather contradictory views a little further, it is necessary to look at the levels of pupil performance that, according to the teachers in the survey, are being achieved in the schools.

Table 11: Levels of Performance in Irish teachers believe are being achieved with most of their pupils.

	%
Percentage of teachers who estimate that they enable most of their pupils:	
to understand Irish	75
to converse in Irish	32
to read in Irish	54
to write in Irish	33
Most pupils' interest in Irish language/culture stimulated	25

Source: INTO (1985) op. cit.

At the moment 75% felt that their pupils achieved understanding in Irish, 54% could read Irish,but only 33% could write or speak Irish. These estimates of pupil performance suggest a pattern which is close to, but not identical with, the findings of another survey using more objective measures (See Harris J. (1984) *Spoken Irish in*

Primary Schools. Dublin, ITE). It would be extremely informative to set these teacher estimates against the responses to Question 39 in the INTO survey. This question asked teachers to specify what they considered to be 'the most realistic' and 'the most desirable' objective as regards the teaching of Irish in the primary school. As far as I can establish the INTO have not to date published the responses to this question. Its significance in the present context is that it would enable us to directly compare the teachers' view of their objectives with their estimates of current achievements. However, while there is no direct evidence on the point, it seems fair to infer from replies to other questions that teachers feel more could and should be done to improve oral skills in Irish. The survey revealed considerable dissatisfaction with many aspects of the main course currently in use, in particular with aspects pertinent to the teaching of conversational skills.

This emphasis on matters of syllabus may seem surprising. Unlike the 1973 survey of primary teachers, the INTO survey does not ask any general questions about factors that affect the level of pupil performance. In 1973, a wide range of factors were considered by teachers to be important. These included: parental attitudes, teachers' attitudes and competence, the ability of the child, teaching methods, syllabus etc., the linguistic environment outside the school and many others. The INTO survey in 1984 concentrates on matters of syllabus, curriculum and teaching objectives and methods as the factors related to pupil performance.

Nonetheless, over 60% of teachers would like to see a new syllabus drawn up for the teaching of Irish and over 70% would like to see it give greater emphasis to oral Irish. Interestingly, the second factor deemed to require more emphasis (by 48%) in a new syllabus is 'Irish culture and traditions'. In the 1973 survey very few teachers reported this factor as a significant variable influencing the learning of Irish. The fact that half of the teachers now regard it as important may indicate a belief that the curriculum and/or syllabus no longer provide a supportive context for the teaching of Irish.

(b) Who should learn Irish?

In regard to this issue, it is necessary to consider four rather important questions, three of which were also included in the MRBI national survey. Table 12 summarises the responses.

Table 12: Percentage of Primary Teachers and the Public agreeing with policy statements about the position of Irish in Primary schools.

Policy Statement	Primary Teachers % Agree	Public % Agree
(a) Children with low achievement in language skills should not be obliged to learn Irish.	66	n.a.
(b) Children whose parents object to their being taught Irish should not be obliged to learn the language.	47	60
(c) Children who show low academic achievement levels should not be obliged to learn Irish.	60	56
(d) All primary-school children should learn Irish.	42	62

Source: INTO and MRBI 1984 and 1985 op. cit.

Before commenting on this table, one or two technical points are in order. The proportion of teachers *disagreeing* with items (b) and (d) was 45% and 50% respectively. Not merely are these responses fairly closely balanced, but the percentage reporting 'no opinion' (8%) is as large or larger than the difference, especially in the case of (b). In addition, as I have already noted, one needs to be sensitive to the possibility of bias in the sample (due to the high non-response rate) in interpreting items like these.

Secondly, it is important to note that the first three items in this table are logically related to the fourth. Such questions are best kept well separate in a questionnaire, but all these questions were grouped together in both surveys. It is also unfortunate that the fourth item, which was placed *last* of the group in the teachers survey was placed *first* in the group in the MRBI survey. Comparisons between the two surveys have, as a consequence, to be somewhat provisional.

Bearing these qualifications in mind, it would appear that teachers and the public are most likely to be in agreement that pupils who show low academic achievement should not be obliged to learn Irish, although the question in the MRBI survey is not specifically confined to primary school children. If anything, teachers are more likely to be of this view. On the question of accommodating parents who might not want their children taught Irish, teachers are noticeably more reticent and are in fact evenly divided on the issue. This is understandable enough in that the teachers themselves would be the principal assessors of a child's academic performance but in the second case the parents could decide with, perhaps, unpredictable consequences for classroom practices.

A difference arises again with the last item (d). The public would appear to be more insistent that all children learn Irish in primary school than teachers. Part of this difference is undoubtedly due to the technical problems I have referred to, but I would be surprised if no difference existed between the teachers and the public on this point.

Finally some comparisons with other surveys may be noted. The 60-66% of teachers who felt that children of low general or low linguistic ability should not be obliged to learn Irish reflects a concern revealed in the 1973 survey. However, on that occasion a clear majority felt that Irish should still be universally taught at primary school level. Regarding weaker pupils, primary teachers at the time felt that, given an 'ideal teaching programme' modest but real skills in Irish could be taught to such pupils. This is clearly an issue requiring further investigation.

At 42%, the percentage of teachers who felt that all children should learn Irish would appear to be somewhat lower than the support among teachers for this policy in 1973 (58%). But the context within which this question was asked in 1984 was different.

(c) Minority Responses

In conclusion, some comment is necessary about the views held by minorities within the teaching body. The identity and character of minorities can, of course, only be reliably established with the help of much more analysis than has so far been contained in published reports. Nonetheless, the consistency with which roughly similar sized minorities, both positive and negative with regard to Irish, appear in the data does suggest the possibility that such groups would emerge from further work. On the 'negative' side, a percentage in the range 15-30% report only fair to weak conversational ability in Irish (34%); never read newspaper articles, magazines or books in Irish; do not like speaking Irish; feel indifferent or opposed to the teaching of Irish; have become less favourable to teaching Irish since they began teaching; feel that teaching Irish to most pupils is a waste of time; would like to spend less time teaching Irish or stop altogether and do not feel that all-Irish schools should be

provided when parents demand them. On the 'positive' side slightly smaller percentages, 10-25%, are fluent in Irish; 'often' read books, magazines or newspaper articles in Irish; speak Irish as much as possible; have become more favourable to the teaching of Irish since they began teaching; would like to devote more time to teaching Irish and would like to teach in an all-Irish primary school.

If such minorities exist, and the possibility can only be suggested here, then their size and characteristics may tell us more about the dynamics of change within the teaching body than an analysis confined to an examination of the overall views.

CONCLUSIONS

The primary purpose of this paper, as stated in its opening paragraphs, has been to assess the overall degree of consistency and compatability between recent surveys of public and teacher attitudes towards Irish. Although there are some technical problems to be faced, I feel that the main surveys reviewed here are broadly consistent with each other. There are, of course, differences in emphasis and timing but these variations enrich and extend the general data-base. It therefore seems to me that the differences which appear in the commentaries on these reports arise from differences *in interpreting* research findings rather than discrepancies in the data itself. The interpretation offered in this paper is summarised in the following paragraphs, and in Appendix A some aspects of the TNTO commentaries are critically assessed in the light of the foregoing discussion.

With regard to educational policy, and probably all areas of social policy, the public pursue a plurality of objectives. The teaching of Irish to all or most children is part of such a set of objective but it is only a part. People want the educational system to do other things as well. Multiple objectives, of course, create tensions and problems within policy formation and implementation processes. Thus, the state's policy on the Irish language over the years may be understood as a process of adaptation to shifts in the weighting attached by the public to different elements in the mix of attitudes that govern its position on Irish in the schools.

The recent surveys of public attitudes would, by and large, seem to endorse the general thrust of present policies. There is majority public support for including Irish on the curriculum for primary schools, for teaching it to all or most children, for teaching it as a subject rather than through a bilingual programme, for beginning the teaching of Irish in infant classes and devoting the same amount of time to it as at present. These are key elements of the present programme. There is also evidence that public attitudes have become more favourable to the overall language objective and related policies in the last decade.

It is clear that while there is majority support for Irish within the curriculum, the public would wish the curriculum to include other subjects also and some of these are considered by the public to be of more importance than Irish for the education of their children. Although the progressive inclusion of other subjects in the curriculum could proceed to the point where Irish, or any other less valued subject, could be pushed off, there is no evidence in these surveys that this is occurring or that the majority of the public would wish it.

Among the public there is a majority view that 'slow learners' should not be obliged to learn Irish. In addition, a majority of the public feel that children should not be obliged to learn Irish against the wishes of their parents. These views most probably represent a continuation of the anti-compulsion syndrome found in CLAR's attitudinal studies in 1973. The policy changes made in that year constitute the most recent attempt by the state to re-align the school policy for Irish with public opinion.

Large minorities of children now receive state examination certificates without passing the Irish paper. In addition, small proportions of children do not present themselves for the Irish examination and may not, in fact, study Irish at all. To some extent, therefore, the state has moved to accommodate the views of people who feel that a child should not be unduly pressurised into learning Irish, particularly at post-primary school. Unfortunately, it is not clear from the evidence of the present surveys how the public now consider that intervention and its consequences.

None of the recent surveys has clearly identified a group of parents who feel that their children shouldn't learn Irish. However, it must be noted that CLAR identified a 20-25% minority whom it felt was 'actively and consistently opposed to bilingual objectives and related policies.' Further analysis of the ITE survey may identify a similar group in 1983, although early indications are that it would be of smaller proportions. On the other hand, the ITE survey did identify a clear minority of 20-25% who would like to see bilingual or all-Irish programmes in general use and a similarly sized minority who would themselves support local all-Irish schools.

In other words, if a demand for change can be read into the results of the surveys, then it would seem to be coming from minority groupings with very different viewpoints and demands. However, in the long run the most significant finding to emerge from these surveys may be the ITE survey's tentative suggestion of an incipient process of marginalisation of the whole 'Irish language question', especially within state institutions. This would seem to me a more important question to debate and investigate than the balance of percentages on specific issues.

The survey of primary teachers conducted by the INTO shows that teachers continue to be among the groups in the state that are the most proficient in Irish, most favourably disposed to it and use it most often. As teachers, large majorities are enthusiastic about teaching Irish, would like to see the teaching of Irish begin in infant or junior classes and would like to devote as much time to teaching Irish as at present.

Like the public, a majority of teachers feel that Irish should not be taught to children of low academic ability or with weak linguistic skills. However, the teachers are noticeably more hesitant about endorsing the principle that parents should be allowed to decide if their children are to learn Irish at primary school. Teachers are equally divided on this issue.

On the matter of syllabus, teachers are clearly of the view that the present syllabus is out of alignment with the time available to teach Irish and they also feel that it is insufficiently attentive to the objective of teaching oral skills and Irish culture and traditions. A majority would like to see a new syllabus drawn up.

However, surveys of school-children and young adults clearly show that positive attitudes towards learning Irish rest in a large part in the perceived advantages a knowledge of Irish gives in examinations and the job market. In the long-run, policies in these areas have as great, or even greater, effect than matters of syllabus on who wants to and who does not want to study and learn Irish.

Lastly, it should be noted that the findings of some of the surveys reviewed here have only been published in preliminary form so far. Fuller details will allow for a more extensive examination of the issues discussed in this paper.

APPENDIX A

COMMENTS ON THE INTO SUMMARY STATEMENTS

In June 1985, when summary reports of the INTO surveys were being published, three pages purporting to briefly summarise the reports were also released by the INTO. The exact status of these pages is unclear. Two are simply titled "Summary of Conclusions" (MRBI survey) and "Conclusions" (INTO Teachers Survey). The third page provides a brief comparison between the two surveys. Unlike the summary reports themselves, which are straightforward, succinct resumes of the results, these pages represent an attempt not to summarise but to interpret the data. They were described by an INTO officer as a "press statement, the comment of the Organisation in publishing the report" although the pages themselves are nowhere titled as such.

It will be clear to even the most casual reader that my interpretation differs from that of the INTO in significant ways. Whereas my differences with the INTO are implicit in the preceding pages, I feel that it would be only fair to state my misgivings in more explicit form here.

There is an overall tendency in these INTO statements to present the results in more negative terms than are justified by the data. Important findings appear to me to be consistently ignored or misrepresented. This is particularly the case as regards the survey of public attitudes, less so in the case of the teachers survey.

(a) Important Findings which are Ignored:

Examples: — 62% of the public felt that Irish should be taught to ALL children
— 52% of the public felt that the time devoted to Irish was "just right" AND 22% wanted more time for Irish. Thus 74% overall supported the present allocation of time or better.
— only 4% felt that Irish should not be taught at all.

The MRBI survey, from which the above items are taken, used a very short questionnaire — only nine questions in all. Space therefore, cannot have been the reason for the above omissions.

(b) Findings which are Misrepresented

Examples: — It is stated that "there is no support for the allocation of additional time or resources to the teaching of Irish". This is totally incorrect. In the MBRI survey, to which this statement refers, 48% of the public would like to see MORE resources devoted to the teaching of Irish (if Government money were available) and 22% of the public would like MORE time given to Irish.

— It is stated that "both national teachers and the general public agree that a knowledge of Irish is not essential for most people". There was not a majority of teachers in agreement with this view, in fact the responses were fairly evenly balanced at 49/45%. No question of this kind was asked of the public.

— It is stated that "the public regards Irish as of less importance than other subjects". As a summary of the four questions asked in the MRBI survey on this issue this is very misleading. In the first of these questions, Irish ranked third, considerably ahead of all other subjects except English and Maths. In two of the remaining ques-

tions. Irish ranked second/third against the very small number of other subjects with which respondents could make comparisons. This statement rests, therefore, on the replies to just one question out of four and ignores the contradictory evidence.

— The survey questions referred to in the previous paragraph are consistently misrepresented. Each of these questions collected two, not one, statistics — a measure of relative importance and a measure of absolute importance. Both of these measures are of significance if we are to understand the public mind on these issues. Yet in these summary pages we are always given just one statistic, usually the one with the more negative connotation. For example, we are told in these pages that "One third of the public rates Irish as being one of the most important subjects for children to learn at school". We are not told that Irish in this question is considered the third most important of a long list of subjects. In other words, we are given the absolute but not the relative statistic.

In the case of the other questions of this kind we are given the opposite information — the relative but not the absolute statistic. That is to say, we ARE told, for example, that Irish is ranked least important of seven subjects, but NOT that 64% regard it as an important subject for school-leavers.

These are the more serious of my misgivings about these summary pages. I may say in conclusion that it will be clear from the body of my paper that I nowhere claim that the findings of these and other recent surveys show a public holding straightforward positive views about Irish. On the contrary, I argue that public attitudes are complex and contain both negative and positive elements. But all of these elements have to be given their due weighting if we are to construct a policy that accurately reflects the public view. The quality and tenor of public debate on this issue is not well served by misrepresenting survey results.

APPENDIX B

LIST OF SURVEYS REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

(1) The Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research (1970-1975)

The surveys conducted by the Committee on Irish Language Attitudes Research (CLAR) in 1973 are of significance to this discussion if for no other reason than the fact that they are now over ten years old. Thus, they provide us with a kind of a baseline against which we can establish the direction in which attitudes are moving. It is not generally realised that CLAR undertook not one but a number of quite different surveys which were integrated into a single programme and report. Two of these surveys are of particular interest — the NATIONAL and the PRIMARY TEACHER surveys.

(a) The national survey was a comprehensive examination of language attitudes, abilities and language use patterns among the Irish public. A random sample of 2500 persons over 17 years of age was interviewed in the spring and early summer of 1973.

(b) The survey of national teachers was conducted in a somewhat different way. A random sample of teachers was selected, using primary schools as sampling units, but the survey was conducted by means of a postal survey. It is a characteristic of postal surveys that the response rate tends to be somewhat lower than those which use face-to-face interviews. In this case about 60% of the sample returned the questionnaire. Nevertheless, provided this is taken into account the survey does give us some very useful information about the views of primary school teachers at that time.

(2) Institiuid Teangeolaiochta Éireann (1983)

The first of the more recent surveys was conducted by Institiuid Teangeolaiochta Éireann (ITÉ) in 1983. This study was designed to update the CLAR survey of ten years earlier and the questionnaire and survey methodology were similar. The random sample, however, was smaller, in this case some 1,000 persons were interviewed. This sample was designed to oversample young adults (under 30 yrs.) and when this is taken into account, the adjusted total was just 800 but this is still comfortably within the normal range of national surveys.

(3) The INTO Survey of Primary Teachers (1984)

The survey undertaken by the INTO among their members in 1984 was, like the CLAR survey of teachers, conducted through the post. It was also a long and detailed questionnaire dealing with both general issues of the attitudes of teachers towards Irish, their ability in Irish and their use of the language. In addition, a large section dealt with the teaching programme; its objectives, methods, results, difficulties etc. Unlike the CLAR survey, however, the INTO attempted to obtain responses from all of their members and not just from a sample. The response rate nonetheless, was similar to postal surveys generally and only some 10,000 members replied or about 49% of the total membership.

(4) The MRBI National Survey (1985)

The final survey to be considered in detail is the survey conducted by the Market Research Bureau of Ireland in 1985 for the INTO. The questionnaire was quite short and dealt mostly with aspects of educational policy on Irish. In this national survey 1,000 adults were interviewed. The methodology was somewhat different from that used by CLAR or ITÉ. Instead of random sampling, quota sampling methods were used.

(5) IMS/Bord na Gaeilge Youth Survey (1980)

Just 1,000 young single people aged 10-24 years were interviewed in this survey. Among the questions asked were a small number that dealt with attitudes towards Irish in the schools.

(6) The ESRI Survey of Post-Primary Students (1981)

For details of this major survey see Hannon D. and R. Breen et. al. (1983) *Schooling and Sex Roles: Sex Differences in Subject Provision and Student Choice in Irish Post-Primary Schools.* Dublin, The Economic and Social Research Institute.

(7) The ITE Survey of Young Adults (1983)

This sample of 420 adults under 30 years formed part of the main ITE survey described above.

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